

Planning helps you winter well, wherever you are

Wintering practices have been a focus for Southern farmers in recent years.

WORDS & IMAGES BY DAIRYNZ SENIOR SCIENTIST, DAWN DALLEY

We've seen significant changes in wintering in Southland and South Otago—with greater recognition that farmers are making strong progress to improve environmental outcomes and animal care.

But getting wintering practices right is important on all farms because every year, in almost every region, there's the potential for ongoing wet weather over winter. Caring for your cows in these conditions is a top priority.

Setting yourself up to winter well now

Winter weather differs between regions, but most farms experience sodden paddocks and mud at some stage. Cows need to lie for more than eight hours a day to stay healthy and comfortable. Research at the Southern Dairy Hub shows that during, and on the day after, heavy rain, some animals don't lie down for up to 24 hours when soils become saturated.

It's important to consistently monitor paddocks, the weather and your animals'

behaviour throughout winter. If wet conditions persist and cows aren't getting enough rest, it's time to take action to make them comfortable.

Having a written contingency plan will help improve animal care. If you don't already have a wintering plan, sit down with your team to get options on paper.

Developing and actioning a wintering plan

Your plan should include options to get cows to a drier, preferably sheltered, area with feed. It should also cover when to implement contingency plans. No two farms will have the same threshold for implementing their contingency plan, so make sure everyone on your team knows when to act on your farm.

As a team, plan how you can carry out checks of the paddock conditions and mobs at various times of the day. Sharing what you're seeing with each other will help with decision-making.

Assessing conditions across each paddock will make it easier to predict what the paddocks might look like in the next few days, and what your options are. Consider whether conditions will improve, get worse or stay the same.

To get an idea of what your cows are up to, look for 'lying bowl' marks left by cows in the soft crumbly soil. If you can't see lying bowls or your cows have a lot of wet mud on their flanks, this indicates they haven't been lying or they've been on a sodden, muddy surface, and you should provide them alternatives.

Taking note of how your animals are behaving is useful—are they calm and content, or restless? You and your team know your farm and cows better than anyone, so you'll know the best options for managing your animals in wet weather.

DairyNZ has online resources to make wintering easier for everyone:



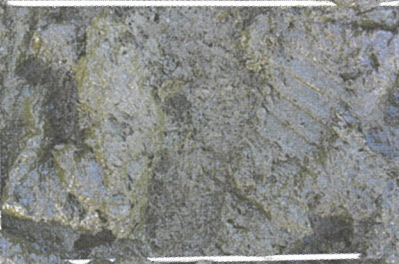

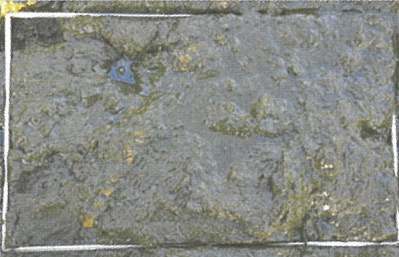

- dairynz.co.nz/winter-plans
- dairynz.co.nz/contingency-plan

We can't predict the weather, but with good planning and implementation you and your team can provide the best conditions possible to successfully winter your cows.



DAWN DALLEY
DAIRYNZ SENIOR SCIENTIST

THE GUMBOOT SCORING METHOD FOR WINTERING PADDOCKS

LOW/DRY			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boot imprint dry and sides remain formed; • Easy to walk across; • No liquid pooling; • If soil is held in hands, does not seep through fingers; • Soil is firm.
			NO ACTION REQUIRED
MEDIUM/WET			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boot imprint wet, may be sticky and less defined • Mud sticks to your gumboot • No liquid pooling • If soil is held in hands, some seeping through fingers • Soil is sticky
			MONITOR CONDITIONS
HIGH/SODDEN			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boot imprint disappears • Liquid pooling obvious • If soil is held in hands, seeping through fingers • Soil is liquified
			IMPLEMENT PLAN B